

Lots of the Mertzon country missed the big rains that fell on Texas in May. Showers skipped around, blessing some outfits, but the weather failure seemed to be far from ready to release its horrible grip.

High winds and thunderstorms whipped in and out from the north and west during the wet spells. Young Goat Whiskers reported a tree blazing in his west pasture from a lightning bolt. Whiskers brushed the matter off, but I told him he might be wise to turn his blazing tree episode over to a bible scholar for analysis.

Far be it from a layman to say, but if the Big Fellow in the sky grows tired of such tricky transgressions as allowing your hair goats to constantly stray on your neighbor's properties and keeping 2400 pound fence-jumping bulls across the fence from his weaned heifers, the next sign may be heftier than a few a mesquite limbs burning in your west pasture.

Over close to Spring Creek, a hail storm hit harder than the fire on the Whiskers ranch. Oaks and pecan trees lost their leaves, and mesquites looked like beavers had been gnawing on the bark.

One rancher found deer and turkeys dead in his pasture. The lady I know ranching on Spring Creek claimed the hail stones fell bigger than softballs and had big chunks of ice in the downpour. All the birds disappeared from her front

yard and she hadn't seen the wild turkeys in the back in days.

Hail storms hurt all of nature, but armadillos and turtles take the brunt of the forces. An armadillo who sustains direct hits from hail stones develops eye tics and tail twitches that make the beat of a flamenco dance sound tame as a flute concert.

The after-effects on turtles or terrapins cause acute withdrawal. Not only do they suffer deep melancholy, dangerous sun blindness develops from hiding in their shells so long.

Armadillos recover in a few weeks, but months later, turtles keep falling off logs backwards snapping at imaginary flies.

Crawdads, or crayfish, also take a beating if they are caught out on the banks of the river. Beaned crawdads are easy to spot. Instead of walking backwards like crabs, their ambulation is reversed and quite often they have gimpy claws and swayed backs.

"Softball" and "golf ball"-sized hailstones are the standard measurement for the shortgrass country. The biggest storm the county ever recorded, however, was a basketball-size hail storm up on the Middle Concho River in the 1950s or maybe the 1960s.

The Middle Concho neighborhood is known not only for big hailstones but for gargantuan scale products, ferocious sized rattlesnakes and gigantic yellow catfish.

The area holds the record for weaning a set of 700 pound twin calves and shipping a 200 percent lamb crop in the same year a 32-point buck was killed on the banks of the river.

The ranch shares the same radio channel as the ranchers on the Concho watershed. Part of the expense can be charged off as entertainment. Rarely a day passes they don't see a black-tailed albino wolf or flush a big star-faced tarantula out of a thicket on the creek bottom.

Biologists think hail storms stimulate growth and it sure may be, the way cattle and lambs weighed coming off the basketball country.

For certain, hail storms inspire human imagination. Lots of good material comes off the Middle Concho valley and few witnesses interfere, which makes it an even better climate for story telling....